

CHALK TALK: Go Forth and Write Your World

By KEVIN HODGSON

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Note: This is an open letter to all of my sixth grade students who wrote with me this year at the William E. Norris Elementary School in Southampton, Massachusetts. I am grateful for their presence in my teaching life.



Dear young writers,

My, how time flies. It seems like just the other day that I was showing you the ways in which we set up our notebooks for Writing into the Day activities, and here we are, more than 75 writing prompts later, with the end of the school year right around the corner. In that time, you have done a wealth of writing, from designing treehouses and vehicles of the future and other visual prompts; to crafting short stories, essays, research papers and poems; to putting argument to work on persuasive video game reviews and so much more.

Yes, we sure wrote a lot this year. Some of you let me know that fact, in no uncertain terms, and others of you, thanked me. Writing skills often develop and flourish from flexing that muscle of the brain and the pencil (or keyboard). It's just like sports and many of the other activities that many of you do in the hours beyond school. I suspect you may not have loved every literacy activity we did. That's OK. But I do hope that some of what we did sparked your interest and talents as young writers this year. Whether it was making webcomics, designing and publishing video games, developing characters to set off on a story adventure, or making digital poetry and picture books, I hope you found an entry point for your imagination.

I know I have seen growth in all of you as young writers. When I peruse the writing samples from early September, and compare them to the writing you have done here at the end of the year, it reminds me of how far some of you have come. And that change is due to you and your efforts. Your ability to dive in, and to persevere, and to learn from each writing moment, is a model for how we all learn in life, outside of the school classrooms. If you have learned about learning itself, which I know sounds odd but is important, then that may be the best lesson that I, and all of your teachers through the years, can impart to you. The gift of learning, of knowing that we are never done with our understanding of the world, is a powerful token of understanding that will take you far.

This is why we try to spark creative and open-ended thinking. This is why we have you drawing in writing class, writing in science class, doing oral presentations in social studies class and

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stretching your imagination in math class. This is why we collaborate together. Life is a full and swirling mix of knowledge, and the more you move away from putting your subject area classes into boxes, the better off you will be. Granted, the existing school system makes that difficult at times. We send you off to “science” or “social studies” or “math.” But be open to seeing beyond those boxes.

And, above all else, remain writers.

Write on napkins. Write on sticky notes. Write in notebooks. Write in text messages on your phones and devices. Write fan fiction. Use writing as a means to produce videos, and think about how writing informs game design. Write poems, and turn those poems into songs, and those songs into visuals. Collaborate with others on writing. Journal for yourself, in silence. Find ways to explore the inner world of your mind with words and language, and do the same with the outer world of social connections. Be open to adventure. Bend the world in your direction.

My young writers, I am grateful for all that you shared with me this year. You often let me into your lives through your stories and poems and analytical thinking. I am honored and humbled to have been able to spend the past year with you.

Now, go forth, and write.

Sincerely from your biggest fan in the world,

Mr. Kevin Hodgson

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